

# RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

LEAFLETS  
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LAVATERA ASSURGENTIFLORA  
MALVA ROSA OR TREE MALLOW

Prepared  
by  
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN  
of the  
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon  
Orange County  
California



LAVATERA ASSURGENTIFLORA  
MALVA ROSA OR TREE MALLOW

May 17, 1940

## Malvaceae

## Mallow Family

Rounded evergreen shrub growing 10 to 15 ft. high; bark of young branches light green, that of old ones light gray; main trunks often 3 to 4 in. in diam. Herbage nearly glabrous to stellate-pubescent. Leaves alternate; petioles 3 to 6 in. long; blades maple-like, 3 to 5 in. across, palmately 5-lobed, coarsely and irregularly margined with blunt teeth, upper surface light green and nearly glabrous, lower surface much paler, pubescent. Flowers 1 to several in the axils, on pedicels 2 to 3 in. long, inconspicuously jointed well above the middle. Calyx subtended by a 2 to 3 lobed involucre about  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. high; calyx cylindric, about 1 in. high, with 5 triangular, spreading lobes. Corolla 2 to 3 in. across, composed of 5 petals  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 in. long; the claw narrow, greenish-yellow, bearded at very base; the blade truncate, deep rose with darker veins, rotately spreading but soon deflexed. Stamens numerous, scattered along the upper portion of the tube of filaments. Ovary consisting of about 8 carpels, pistil 1, but bearing about 8 purple stigmas, these not exerted until after the pollen is shed (this tends to insure pollination from a different flower). Fruit  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. across,  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. high, closely covered by the much enlarged and now broadly urn-shaped calyx; carpels generally 8, separating at maturity, each containing a single dark brown seed. In germination the cotyledons appear above ground, have petioles  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. long and blades  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. long.

The genus Lavatera (name in honor of 2 Swiss brothers named Lavater) consists of over 20 species, mainly of the Mediterranean region, but represented also by 1 species in Australia, 3 on the islands off the west coast of Mexico and 1 on the California islands. Several of the species from the Mediterranean region are occasionally cultivated in California gardens.

Lavatera assurgentiflora (the specific name coined from Latin refers to the erect flowers) was first discovered on Anacapa Island, off the coast of Santa Barbara Co. It was described in 1854 by Dr. Albert Kellogg, beloved California botanist and early member of the California Academy of Sciences. This species was known to the Spanish-Californians as Malva Rosa. Its English name is generally given as Tree Mallow, but is not distinctive, since other species of Lavatera are also similarly designated. It occurs sparingly on several of the islands off



the California coast and some slight differences in the forms from each of these islands resulted in one botanist (E.L. Greene in 1911) describing them as separate species. They are all now generally regarded as constituting a single species, closely related to those of the Mexican Islands and particularly to L. insularis of the Coronado Isls. At one time all of these Western American species were thought to have been introduced from the Mediterranean region by the Mission Fathers. Professor Jepson has recently (1936) given this hypothesis thorough consideration and concluded that the American species are indigenous. *Malva Rosa* is now sparingly naturalized on the California mainland and is likely to be found anywhere near the coast from San Diego to San Francisco.

*Malva Rosa* is perhaps a bit too coarse a plant for fine gardens of limited space, nevertheless, it is a very useful and somewhat ornamental shrub. It has long been planted along the coast of Central and Southern California where it makes an ideal large shrub or hedge for protecting gardens from the salt-laden coastal breezes. Its efficacy in this regard is well demonstrated in the San Francisco Bay region where many miles of untrimmed hedges border the commercial flower and vegetable gardens. It is also a useful large shrub for hiding ugly fences, chicken houses or other outbuildings. In new gardens it can be planted for quick effect while slower and more attractive shrubs are getting established. When given ample space a single plant will attain a height of over 15 ft. and an even greater spread. Its rose-purple flowers are borne throughout the spring and summer, but are partially hidden by the luxuriant foliage.

Propagation of Lavatera assurgentiflora is easy. Seeds planted in boxes or in beds in the fall or early spring will produce plants several inches high within a few weeks. These can be set out direct and with ample water may attain heights of 3 to 6 ft. the first season, after which little or no water is necessary although better looking plants result if some water is given. The plants thrive in any soil from pure sand to heavy adobe, but probably do not survive for more than ten years under cultivation. Pruning back to hard wood in the late fall or very early spring will result in vigorous new growth and the plants can thus be kept to almost any desired size. This species may also be propagated from cuttings taken in the early spring. These root so readily that successful field plantings could be made by putting out the unrooted cuttings.



RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN  
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted  
to the growth and study of the native plants  
of California for their botanical, horticult-  
ural and popular features.

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